

Minutes
Regular meeting of the City of Reading Planning Commission
February 25, 2014 at 7:00 pm

Members present:

Ermete J. Raffaelli, Chairman
Brian J. Burket, Vice Chairman
Michael E. Lauter, Secretary
Wayne Jonas Bealer, Assistant Secretary

Staff present:

Andrew W. Miller, Planning Office

Others present:

Michael D. Hartman, dH Enterprises Inc.
Miguel A. Herrera, Milan Consulting Group
Rafael Abreu, Jet Set Restaurant LLC
Thieu X. Mai
James A. Koppenhaver, James A. Koppenhaver PE
Victor M. Espinal, High Tech Auto Repair
Barry K. Greenly, Keller Williams Realty Elite
Stephen F. DeLucas, Reading Eagle Company

Chairman Raffaelli called the February meeting to order, and asked for acceptance of the agenda. Mr. Miller requested the additions of (1) a review of the fate of the 'Downtown Station' post office and (2) an opportunity for further comment on the 'Mimmo's' rezoning petition, covered at the November 2013 meeting. Mr. Burket moved to accept the February 25th agenda, with the requested additions. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to accept the modified February agenda.

Subdivision and Land Development:

Jet Set Restaurant Parking Area – parking lot land development plan [0:00.59]

Mr. Hartman, making the first presentation since the August 2013 meeting, explained that the plan had been submitted to the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation. He received their comments, and submitted his revisions about two weeks earlier. He acknowledged some similar comments in the City Engineer's review. He submitted to the Berks County Conservation District, noting that the person who reviewed the original application had left the District for another position. He said there were still some minor plan revisions to be made. Mr. Miller agreed with the characterization of the status, adding that he was waiting on some written direction from the Zoning Administrator regarding the zoning history and notes provided on the cover sheet. Asked about a comment regarding a trench drain for the driveway(s), Mr. Hartman indicated he'd pursue that with the Plumbing Inspector. Mr. Miller recommended tabling the plan, pending receipt of the other permits.

Mr. Lauter moved to table the final plan. Mr. Bealer seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to table the Jet Set Restaurant Parking Area plan.

High Tech II Auto Repair – sketch land development plan [0:04.44]

Mr. Koppenhaver distributed an aerial photograph of the property, highlighting the area of the planned addition. He proposed a repair garage in an addition to be built over an area of existing paving. He disputed the need for land development, characterizing it as a building addition, but completely separated from the existing vacant building (formerly Reading Heater & Supply Company Inc.). Mr. Greenly said the zoning permit covers automotive repair and parts sales, adding that the existing building may be used. He said the repair portion focuses on transmissions. He said they've already consolidated two formerly separate parcels. Mr. Miller asked for clarification on the intended separation between the existing and proposed buildings, and the plan for utility services to the proposed. Mr. Koppenhaver said that hadn't been decided, but assumed it would come from extensions of facilities already on the property. Mr. Miller wondered if the layout would allow for subdivision in the future. He asked for the input of the Commission members, advising that the scope qualifies as 'land development'. Recalling an earlier project involving automotive services, Mr. Bealer asked about the capture of oil runoff. Mr. Koppenhaver said that has become increasingly valuable as a recycled product. Mr. Miller confirmed the Plumbing Code covers the necessary traps and separators. Mr. Raffaelli wondered about the sufficiency of off-street parking spaces in a hypothetically full occupancy. Mr. Miller suggested the possibility of waiving the 'land development' requirements,

though the extent proposed exceeds the conditions of the Commission's resolution on 'small projects' (No. 8-98). He hoped to avoid the designing of projects around the minimum submission requirements. Mr. Raffaelli asked about outdoor storage. Mr. Greenly acknowledged there likely would be storage within the fenced area. Mr. Miller noted that areas represented as off-street parking could not be used for automotive sales. Mr. Lauter asked for a clearer description of the operation. Mr. Greenly explained that the developer already operates a garage at 1600 North 10th Street, and needs a place to separate the major repair projects from the general services and inspections at the primary shop. He supposed there'd be some seating area for customers, but characterized the typical work as taking longer than customers would wait on site. Mr. Burket asked if the existing warehouse could be accessed from the new building. Mr. Herrera said it may be connected in the future, as part of a 'phasing' plan for the business, based on available funding. Mr. Bealer asked about the use and intent for some 'out buildings' on the southern portion of the property, suggesting they might be removed for added parking. Mr. Greenly distributed drawings in an attempt to better illustrate the placement of the proposed building, and described each of the existing buildings as being internally connected. Mr. Lauter asked about the required code and 'life-safety' reviews. Mr. Miller explained that he first learned of the project at a meeting with the building-code officials, and understood it would be reviewed as is any new construction. Mr. Greenly added that the requirement was noted on the zoning permit. Asked if there were any 'public improvements' requiring an escrow, Mr. Miller wasn't aware of any, but required a plan of the site and the route of utilities to verify it. Mr. Herrera requested a 'to-do list' of the required information. Mr. Lauter asked about the conditions to be met for land-development waiver. Mr. Miller said it includes the clarification of the proposed building's relation to the existing. Mr. Raffaelli asked if the common walls were independent of the existing building. Mr. Koppenhaver said they'd have to assess the structural integrity of the existing building. He questioned whether the existing building was sprinklered. Mr. Miller said the project had been presented to the building officials at the beginning of December, wondering what had been accomplished since. Mr. Herrera said they had spent some time coordinating, and weren't anticipating the need to submit to the Planning Commission. Mr. Miller claimed to have made that requirement known at that meeting. Mr. Herrera said nothing had been done since that meeting; they had been considering the use of the existing structure, and possible phasing. Mr. Miller counted a number of unknown conditions and contingencies that must be clarified to plan the use of the space and determine the applicability of 'land development'. He noted the new deed consolidated the property in *purparts* rather than in a metes-and-bounds *description*. Mr. Koppenhaver said the separation ratings will depend on the chosen construction type. Mr. Bealer mentioned that new utility services would alone trigger the land development process. Mr. Miller said the questions must be answered by a drawing, though many of the Ordinance's technical requirements may not apply due to the project's size. Mr. Lauter mentioned that the Commission wasn't opposing the *concept* of the project, and reiterated the off-site implications of certain actions that may not have been anticipated. Mr. Koppenhaver said the land development process can be intimidating, requiring a different type of consultant, and often makes the difference in whether a project moves forward.

Other business:

review the draft November 26, 2013 meeting minutes [0:55.21]

Mr. Lauter moved to accept the November meeting minutes, as presented. Mr. Burket seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to accept the November 26th meeting minutes.

Resolution #1-2014

review the draft 2013 Planning Commission Annual Report [0:56.36]

Mr. Bealer complimented the preparation of the report, and asked a couple questions about the statuses of the projects listed. He intended to send some additional 'proof-reading' comments in an email. The members discussed some other projects they'd observed, but didn't review as land developments.

Mr. Burket moved to accept the draft 2013 Annual Report, subject to the forthcoming grammatical edits. Mr. Bealer seconded. Mr. Miller reminded the members to review their 'biographical' entries. And the Commission voted unanimously to accept their draft 2013 Annual Report.

Resolution #2-2014

§303.a.2 review-fate of the 'Reading Downtown Station (Post Office)', 51 North 5th Street [1:03.00]

Mr. Miller said he first learned of the possible closure in October, from a copy of the City Clerk's response to a similar inquiry concerning the 'Carrier Annex' at 1900 North 5th Street. In it, she had mentioned the 'Downtown Station' as being the *more-contributing* historic building. He mentioned the involvement of the City's Historic Preservation Office, and the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission who sent a list of suggested stake-holder contacts. The United States Postal Service skipped several of those suggestions in their January 31st notice – notably the Mayor, City Council and the Planning Commission – though the Historic Preservation

Specialist was copied and earlier this day referred it to the Planning Office. Mr. Miller said that was the first he'd heard of it since the October correspondence, with the possible exception of the newspaper's coverage. He said this may be the only opportunity for the Commission to comment, albeit without any specific question or proposal. Mr. Raffaelli suggested involving the Redevelopment Authority. Mr. Miller wondered if there'd be any federal process analogous to the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process, specifically the solicitation of homeless-assistance concerns, and how they'd market the property in any case. He mentioned the draft covenant intended to protect the 'historic character-defining features' of the building. He wondered how durable such a restriction would prove, and how likely a redevelopment plan that wouldn't involve some violating alteration. He supposed the Commission's comments should relate to the property's future, vis-à-vis the Comprehensive Plan and land-use policies. Mr. Lauter felt any redevelopment should retain the historical character of the exterior, at a minimum, and considered the overall size of the building and property would allow for some flexibility and options in planning its reuse. Mr. Miller offered to communicate the Commission's preference – to preserve the historical significance of the exterior, while recognizing the possible limitations of the layout within – to the Preservation Specialist for inclusion in her response.

§609.c review-zoning map amendment, rezoning 15 Prospect Avenue from R2 to CH [1:18.33]

Mr. Miller said the public hearing, originally scheduled for January 23rd, had been rescheduled to April 1st, offering the Commission another opportunity to consider its (November 26th) recommendation. The members declined.

Mr. Lauter moved to adjourn the February meeting. Mr. Burket seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to adjourn the February 25th meeting. – 8:20p